

shoulder the debt of a big government that routinely spends outside of its means. It is unacceptable that Americans must work at least 5 months of the year just to pay their taxes.

While taxes have continued to mount, so, too, has the Tax Code. Growing more complex, the Tax Code now totals nearly 3,000 pages. Mr. Speaker, the tax burden on our American families is out of control.

Since gaining the majority in 1994, this Congress has continued working to put more money back in the pockets of hardworking Americans. We balanced the Federal budget. We passed the first tax relief in 16 years, and now we have the first budget surplus in generations. Today, the current tax rate is between 1.2 and 2 percent lower than just 2 years ago. Now it is time, Mr. Speaker, to build upon that momentum.

Mr. Speaker, I have supported legislation to abolish the current Tax Code in hopes of establishing a flat tax or a national sales tax. In addition, I supported legislation to abolish some of the most outrageous and unfair taxes in our American families, like the death tax, marriage tax, and capital gains tax. Personally, I have introduced legislation to offer a tax credit for our military personnel.

Mr. Speaker, the Republican Congress continues to prove to the American people its commitments to lower taxes. But we cannot stop now. Lower taxes always should be a top priority. That requires cooperation between Congress and the administration.

This Congress and Congresses of the future must always remember that this money belongs to the people, and we must make every effort to return it to the people.

I hope that the next person elected to serve as President of the United States makes a commitment to simplify the Tax Code to ensure its fairness for the citizens of this country.

Mr. Speaker, today we observe Tax Freedom Day. Let us now continue working to make sure that next year Tax Freedom Day falls on a day we can all celebrate.

TURKISH-KURDISH CONFLICT MUST BE RESOLVED

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, as our military campaign in the Balkans continues, with the noble goal of stopping the ethnic cleansing that the dictator Milosevic has perpetrated against the Kosovar Albanian people, another similar atrocity continues to be perpetrated in the mountains of eastern Turkey against the Kurdish people.

There is a crucial difference between the situations in Kosovo and in

Kurdistan. In the case of Kosovo, the forces of NATO are being used to stop the murderous rampage unleashed by Milosevic. But the Turkish regime that is responsible for the war against the Kurds is actually a member of NATO.

Unfortunately, because Turkey is viewed as a strategic ally of the U.S. and the West, the plight of the Kurds in Turkey has not been given adequate attention by the United States. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we may actually be contributing to the oppression of the Kurds.

The issue of Turkey's war on the Kurds and American support for Turkey was brought into sharp focus earlier this year with the apprehension of Abdullah Ocalan, the leader of the Kurdish independence movement. Mr. Ocalan has been fighting for autonomy for the Kurdish people, who are the victims of oppression by Turkey as well as Iraq, Iran and Syria.

Mr. Speaker, the Turkish regime refuses to even acknowledge the Kurds' existence, referring to them as "mountain Turks", prohibiting all expression of Kurdish culture and language in an effort to forcibly assimilate them, while jailing, torturing, and killing Kurdish leaders.

It is true that the Kurdish communities in Iraq, Iran and Syria also suffer terribly, and we should keep in mind the fate of the Kurds in those countries—indeed, the U.S.-led Operation Provide Comfort in Northern Iraq is an action we can all be proud of. But, frankly, we tend to expect egregious human rights violations to occur under the Iraqi, Iranian and Syrian regimes. Turkey, on the other hand, is a member of NATO, touted as a democracy, a participant in Operation Allied Force. Turkey has received over the years millions of dollars in economic and, especially, military assistance courtesy of the American taxpayer. We have a right to expect better, and Turkey, as a member of NATO and a candidate for the European Union has an obligation to do better.

Furthermore, the mistreatment of the Kurdish population of Turkey is not the only example of Turkey's blatant violation of American values, ideals or interests. The continued occupation of Northern Cyprus and the blockade against Armenia are two other glaring examples where Turkey pursues the kind of policies that we should not accept from any nation, but particularly one of our allies.

Mr. Speaker, I was appalled when it was reported that American intelligence and diplomatic services actually helped a Turkish commando team to capture Mr. Ocalan in Kenya in February of this year. This shameful collaboration with Turkey has resulted in Mr. Ocalan being held in solitary confinement on an island prison in Turkey. He will be tried in a secret military-type court with no jury and no foreign observers.

The prosecutors are seeking the death penalty. There is little hope that Mr. Ocalan will receive a fair trial. In fact, the debate in the Turkish press is

not about whether he will get a fair trial but rather when he will be executed.

According to a recent report by Amnesty International, Mr. Ocalan's defense lawyers are routinely beaten and harassed by Turkish police. The police have even tried to incite public riots against the defense team. The lawyers and their families have received telephone threats.

I should point out that this is in violation of the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, which states that lawyers shall not be identified with their clients or their clients' causes as a result of discharging their functions.

In the United States and in other countries where the rule of law is respected, we believe that everyone, even the most unpopular defendants, has a right to a fair trial. There is no place for a lynch mob mentality.

After 3 months in solitary confinement, denied proper access to his lawyers and being constantly guarded by armed soldiers wearing ski masks, Mr. Ocalan may be suffering a psychological breakdown. All of his meetings with his lawyers are monitored. It is quite possible that he has been subjected to torture.

But if Turkey does go ahead and hang Mr. Ocalan, the result would be to create a martyr for the Kurdish people and to unleash an all-out civil war that would be disastrous for all the people of the region, both Turks and Kurds. Such an outcome is not in anyone's interests, not that of Turkey, not the Kurdish people, not the neighboring countries, certainly not the United States.

Mr. Speaker, in order to encourage the U.S. Government to play a constructive role in heading off a crisis in Turkey, my colleague, the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER), and I will be circulating a letter this week asking our colleagues to sign a letter to President Clinton urging his intervention, to implore that the Turkish authorities show some basic fairness in trying Mr. Ocalan and to spare his life.

The government of Turkey's undeclared war on the Kurds has claimed close to 40,000 lives and caused more than 3 million people to become refugees. Before his arrest, Mr. Ocalan had announced that he was ready to renounce violence and negotiate, but Turkey did not even consider the request. Even worse, Mr. Speaker, the United States did not encourage such negotiations to begin.

Mr. Speaker, it is my belief that it would be more appropriate to have an International Tribunal prosecute Mr. Ocalan since Turkey is at war with the Kurds and cannot be expected to conduct a fair trial. Seeking a fair trial for Mr. Ocalan should be the first step in our efforts to press Turkey to enter into negotiations to achieve a political solution to this tragic struggle.